Greater Horn of Africa

Peace Building Project

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CASE STUDY THREE:

A Middle-Level Dialogue in Burundi: An Assessment of Effective Practices

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in Controlling Violent Conflicts and Building Peace
A Study of Three Approaches in the Greater Horn of Africa

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Table of Contents

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Executive Summary

Burundi, like its neighbor Rwanda, is a country that has been at war with itself. The conflict in Burundi has been going on for four decades. Since 1962 when the country became independent, there have been at least four major clashes between the Tutsi and Hutu, resulting in the death of almost one million people, with other hundreds of thousands Burundi being exiled in neighboring countries. The center of the conflict has been the struggle for the control of the state. Control of the state determines the control and distribution of societal resources. While the fact of competition is a normal political process, the intensity of the struggle for control of the state in Burundi is also informed by the crushing poverty, which characterizes the Burundi political economy. Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world with a GNP per capita of only US $140.00.

Political conflict and poverty have had a negative effect in the evolution and development of a middle class, which is considered to be a crucial ingredient in democratic development. International attempts at mediating the conflict in Burundi has had limited success as the politicization of ethnicity and the resulting “ethnic” violence has eroded opportunities for dialogue between the two principal ethnic groups.

Intervention in the form of promoting middle level (inter-ethnic) dialogue is an initiative supported in part by USAID in Burundi. In its limited duration—less than three years—middle level dialogue has produced fairly significant results, especially in Bujumbura, the capital. Several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s) have sprung up in response to the need to promote dialogue, and have subsequently been supported by USAID. The NGOs have conducted several activities and have programs aimed at peace and reconciliation through dialogue. USAID needs to continue its support of these activities as they provide a parallel process to political level negotiations among groups who vie for state power. In essence middle-level dialogue actually “grounds” the political dialogue by concretizing it among the non-political elite, who in the long run may hold in their hands, the future of peace in Burundi.

Nature of Conflict and Its Causes

In April 1994, the eyes of the world were fixed on Rwanda as the international community watched in horror, an estimated 800,000 people perish in what has now been accepted as genocide by forces associated with the Rwanda government. By June 1994, the significance of the genocide in Rwanda had galvanized international action, leading to the establishment of an International Tribunal to investigate the Rwanda tragedy, and to bring to justice, perpetrators of the genocide. Little mentioned in the discussions about the downing of the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana which was the immediate spark of the genocide in Rwanda, was the fact that on the same downed plane was the President of neighboring Burundi, Cyprien Ntayamira. Even more remarkable, is the fact that between 1972 and 1999, perhaps as many people if not more, have perished in Burundi as those who died in Rwanda during the April 1994 genocide. The significant difference between the two cases is that while the Rwanda incident was concentrated within only a few months, the killings in Burundi have been persistent for three decades, leading one author to conclude that "(t)he ethnic conflict in Burundi has become a model for an extreme version of low-intensity conflict—one where brutality, cruelty, disorganization [have reached] unparalleled heights (Abrams, 1995:153)." One major similarity in the two cases however, is that in both instances, it is the State that has instigated and perpetrated the killings; and the state's actions have been driven and justified by an ethnic ideology. In both countries, the proportion of the population by ethnicity is 15-20 percent Tutsi and 80-85 percent Hutu. These figures however, but more importantly the identification of someone as "Hutu" or "Tutsi," is full of contradictions because of the heavy intermixing of the two peoples (Lemarchand, 1996).

The use of an ethnic or race ideology to justify the oppression or killing of a group of people by another in the world has been widely documented. Perhaps the most notorious case is that of Nazi Germany where state ideology of Aryan superiority resulted in the killing of six million Jews. The Burundi case is by no means as extreme as Nazi Germany; however, the ideology of ethnic domination has been used effectively by the minority ruling Tutsi over the majority Hutu. The fact of Tutsi domination however has been a phenomenon that has evolved over time. At the root of it is the struggle to control the state, which in turn determines the distribution of resources in society. Thus the central problem in Burundi is the classic problem in political struggles: the determination of who gets what, when, and how.

The struggle for the distribution of resources and control of the state in Burundi has undoubtedly created a crisis that has defied easy solutions. This fact has informed many organizations which have been working in Burundi to create conditions for peace. International Alert, one of the organizations working in Burundi has stated:

"[t]here is no doubt that Burundi is, and has been for some considerable time, in a state of severe political crisis. There is an abundance of books, research reports and studies on different aspects of the remote and more contemporary history of recent developments in that country. An analysis of all this documentation does not provide

easy explanations for the present situation of violent conflict and bitter political recrimination. On the contrary, one of the only safe conclusions that can be reached is that the recent events and the present crisis result from an accumulation of past events, with one factor forming a building block for next, and all actors and factors interrelating and interacting in a complex manner." (1997:3)

Although the above study cautions against quick determination of the root cause(s) of the conflict in Burundi, it is quite clear that the political crisis in Burundi has as its central cause, the crushing poverty afflicting the country. In a country where the GNP per capita is US $140; with a growth rate of –3.7 percent in the last decade; and a population with a life expectancy of only 42 years (World Bank, 2000), one can expect to see an intense competition for resources. It is also to be expected that the state with its coercive capacity becomes an attractive target for groups who want to control resource distribution. The use of an ethnic ideology to justify the oppression of one group by another is thus only the next step up. This is where Burundi has been in the past 30 years.

A historical examination of the conflict in Burundi reveals that these were few violent confrontations between Tutsi and Hutu until a little more than 30 years ago. As many studies have shown (Lemarchand, 1970; 1996; Malkki, 1995; Weissman, 1998), when German colonists arrived near the end of the 19th century, Burundi was a long established decentralized kingdom. The principal political rivals were not "Hutu" or "Tutsi" but rather members of a small royal group, the ganwas or "princes of the blood." Although the predominately pastoral Tutsi benefited more from the extensive patron-client system than the mainly agricultural Hutu, the two groups inhabited the same lands, spoke the same language, shared a largely common culture an often intermarried. Despite an overall distinction in social status, their economic circumstances were often quite similar. Even status differences were subject to qualification. Some Hutu clans were very influential, furnishing the ganwas with many of their advisers, managers, religious authorities, and local deputies. And certain Tutsi clans were forbidden to enter the king's court. Generally speaking, regional and family identities appear to have been more central to traditional Burundi politics than ethnic ones.

It was under the influence of colonialism that ethnic ties became more salient. Centralization and modernization eroded old identities based on locality, kinship, and dynastic rule. Moreover, Belgium's colonial takeover after World War I produced authoritarian manipulations of the ganwa system that made it less able to satisfy its Hutu constituents. At the same time, Belgian educational, cultural, and administrative policies promoted the social advance of the "noble" Tutsi over Hutu.

As elsewhere in Africa, the transition to independence spawned a struggle for power among politico-ethnic elites who gravitated toward authoritarianism. But nowhere was the conflict as stark as in overpopulated Rwanda and Burundi where just two groups, with radically different populations and social statuses, confronted one other. There was hope that Burundi might avoid the worst because its ethnic dichotomies were less

extreme than those of its "false twin," Rwanda. But Burundi's politics was heavily influenced by the sudden, Belgian-abetted rise of Hutu power in independent Rwanda, a power that literally drove much of the Tutsi population out of Rwanda. In 1963, Burundi prime minister-designate Prince Louis Rwagasore—a ganwa who had brought Hutu and Tutsi together in the dominant UPRONA (Union for National Progress) party — was assassinated by political rivals. After that, the political process unfolded with the fatalism of a Greek tragedy.

Politico-ethnic conflict centered in the urban elite, led to the assassination and wounding of two more prime ministers. In 1965, when it appeared that the Tutsi side had seized the upper hand, some Hutu officers and politicians attempted a violent coup. This led to the first ethnic pogroms, including the liquidation of almost the entire Hutu political elite. It also ushered in a long series of military-based governments. After another more serious Hutu armed challenge in 1972, the regime murdered 100,000 to 200,000 people in three months, a "selective genocide," that targeted educated Hutu (Lemarchand, 1996:76-84).

The recurrent pattern of Burundi politics was now established: Political exclusion and repression generate extremist movements or resistance that propound ideologies of ethnic superiority and are willing to use indiscriminate violence against other ethnic groups. Many power-holders react in like fashion. In the process, relative moderates are either eliminated or move toward adopting more extreme agendas. "All Burundi," former UN Special Representative Ould-Abdallah has observed, "at a given moment are extremists. For a very simple reason—politics in their country has a vital stake…life and death for each person" (Weissman, 1998:5-6). After a period of restored stability in which regional, clan, and other divisions within the ruling elite come to the fore, the cycle of interethnic violence begins again.

These defining years also marked the rise of the Southern-based Tutsi military-political-business faction known as the "Bururi Lobby." Its ascendancy continues to the present day. The corrupt regime of Captain Michel Micombero was overturned in 1976 by a coup led by his cousin, Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza. Although Bagaza initially promised ethnic reconciliation and took some modernizing economic initiatives, he also pioneered new forms of repression, included a reinforcement of educational discrimination and restrictions on the dominant Catholic Church. The latter, along with moves to downsize the army and charges of government corruption, helped provoke a 1987 coup led by Major Pierre Buyoya, Bagaza's cousin and Micombero's nephew. Now, we are back to Buyoya II.

With this background, the pattern of violence in Burundi had been established. At the center of this violence was the reality of poverty and the intense elite rivalry to control the state, and hence the economic fortunes in society. And as Lund, et-al (1995:49-50) have concluded:

Before and since 1993, Burundi exhibited an unusual number of inherited and institutional factors that…have [been] identified as creating a high potential for violent

conflicts. These included, for example, a violent recent history, deeply polarized and distrustful communities, ethnicized political parties, and weak and fragmented state institutions. But while these factors laid the groundwork for the continued violent pursuit of politics, they did not make violence inevitable. What made the country repeat its past cycle of violence was the deliberate use of various forms of deadly force by members of a small largely self-appointed and self-advancing elite, acting in the name of the two main ethnic communities in their ongoing struggle for political power and material privilege.

The Lund et-al thesis on elite manipulation is amply supported by views of numerous informants I talked to in Bujumbura, between July 11-22, 2000, in a visit to Burundi for this study. The critical question though is what accounts for the fact that for over three decades, elites of both ethnic groups have succeeded in manipulating the opinion of the general population. A partial explanation can be found in the condition of the economy where poverty abounds. Under these conditions, claims by the elite of either ethnic group, that they are fighting for the common interest of the majority becomes an easy sell. But the demonizing of the "other side" and the continued insistence that the other side is interested in the complete physical elimination of its political opponents has led to the coalescing the two groups of people armed with an ethnic ideology. Rene' Lemarchand (1996) has called this process "myth-making." As he argues, mythmaking in Burundi is inextricably bound with the experience – real or anticipated – of genocide:

For the Tutsi it involves both inventing and forgetting: inventing one genocide (the 1993 killings of Tutsi) and forgetting another (the 1972 genocide of Hutu). For the Hutu, it means viewing the 1972 genocide as the most likely scenario for future apocalypses (1996: xii).

Thus part of the key to overcoming the essential psychological problem in the perception of the "other side" as a constant enemy who is ready to pounce on you at every given opportunity is to create conditions by which there is contact in the form of dialogue between groups of people, particularly the non-political elite, from both sides. The idea is both simple and profound: when there is dialogue among people who should have common interests such as peace, and socio-economic improvement, it is more difficult for the political elite to manipulate them. For the non-political elite, it is a matter of opportunity cost. Peace on the one hand means normal life where their children go to school, play in neighborhoods and opportunities for self-improvement are more apparent. Conflict on the other hand means physical insecurity, economic uncertainty and continued economic distress. The process of creating space for dialogue also points to one crucial element in the Burundi crisis. The ability of the political elite to manipulate public opinion in the country is evidence of the lack of a strong civil society to act as a buffer between the state and the rest of society. So the old adage of the crucial "middle" is even more critical in Burundi at this stage in its political development than in many other countries.

Nature of Intervention

USAID along with other international agencies have been active in pursuing a strategy of "creating space for dialogue" among non-political elite groups in Burundi. USAID has provided funding for groups such as Search for Common Ground, which are active in promoting dialogue among Burundi's non-political middle. During my visit, I spent a considerable time with one group: Compagnie des Apotres de la Paix (CAP Group) which is supported by International Alert which is in turn partly supported by USAID. Common Ground was in a leadership transition so I was not able to spend as much time as I did with CAP. The operational objectives of International Alert in Burundi are principally to encourage and facilitate dialogue between political and ethnic antagonists, as a necessary prelude to ending violent conflict and furthering peaceful exchange. It aims to accomplish these objectives by enhancing the capacity of Burundi in peace making, by strengthening the knowledge and skills of individuals, and the capacities of groups and organizations, to work for a just and durable peace. One of the activities supported by International Alert is CAP.

CAP emerged from an early study-tour to South Africa in 1996 by influential political adversaries and other senior figures in Burundi. Members of the study-tour included members of parliament, judges, military officers and others. The idea of the study-tour to South Africa was to demonstrate to the antagonists in Burundi that peace and reconciliation was possible even in the most difficult circumstances. South Africa was an excellent example of this view. The transition from apartheid to a democratic regime in South Africa had succeeded because all parties to the conflict were willing to move forward and create conditions for peace. The assumption was that if it could be done in South Africa, it could also be done in Burundi. The key though, lay in the attitude of the elite. The various group elites in South Africa had managed to largely convince their constituents that there would be room for everybody in a new and democratic South Africa and so compromise was necessary. Without compromise, South Africa would go down in flames with everybody in it. The compromises were made and South Africa is a living successful example of political compromise.

Upon their return to Burundi, most of the members in the study-tour formed CAP with the idea of forging an inter-ethnic dialogue among the elite, and to bring the idea of compromise and dialogue to the general public. CAP now comprises of about fifty active members. In terms of their activities, a few examples should suffice:

April – July 1998, an Executive Committee member and the Coordinator attended the Responding to Conflict (RTC) ten-week training course in Birmingham, UK.

During 1998, CAP organized a number of conferences in Bujumbura, one in May 1998 on the South African experience of transition

August 1998, CAP organized a public forum on the status of the Arusha negotiations

While in Bujumbura, I attended a function organized by CAP. The function was a Friday evening social at one of the local neighborhood eateries. Both Hutu and Tutsi attended the function, although the majority of the attendees were clearly Tutsi. The significance of the social was that in the recent historical past, Hutu and Tutsi rarely met socially. The social distance has actually contributed to the problem of "mythmaking" and "demonizing" the other side. The theory, and indeed the practical implications of the socials is that after sharing a meal or drink, people begin to talk about what is really important to them – safe neighborhoods, good schools, good clinics – and this leads to the realization that people from both sides face similar problems. Thus, resolving those problems begins to assume a priority, which otherwise they would lack under conditions of conflict. More importantly, these groups begin to see that there is more to be gained by cooperating than in conflict. It was therefore truly remarkable at the mentioned function when the dozen or so people gathered reacted in a collective dismay at the sound of gunfire on the outskirts of the city. The time was about 7:30 P.M. Most people's simple statement was "what do these people want now?"

The rationale for choosing middle level dialogue as a basis for peacemaking and peace building is premised on the assumption that people who talk to each other are less likely to kill each other if, and when, there is a dispute. Continued contact actually opens the door for opportunities to resolve problems in a peaceful manner. Further, given the history of conflict in Burundi, and the way the political elite has manipulated the political situation to its advantage, the "crucial middle" needs to take charge of setting the political agenda. This strategy will lead to the creation of a civil society, which over time will be the basis for establishing and enhancing democratic governance.

Implementation of Intervention

In Burundi, middle level dialogue has been going on for at least three years. The impetus for the current dialogue was the study-tour of South Africa in 1996. Over and above CAP which is supported by USAID, there are other organizations such as Alert which support other initiatives such as assistance to parliamentarians (to understand their role in building democracy and fostering dialogue); support for Burundi diaspora dialogue: dialogue and debate between Barundi from inside the country and those in exile. Alert has also supported the women's peace program through grants to the Collective Women's Organizations (CAFOB). CAFOB has played an important role in two campaigns in the last two years. The first was in response to the disappointing representation of women in the new government (Buyoya II) formed after the signing of the internal partnership agreement in June 1998. The campaign could not change the composition of the new government but it influenced the later nomination of a woman as President of the Constitutional Court. The second campaign was to gain acceptance of women at the Arusha negotiations. At the June 1998 Arusha meeting, there was only one woman in one delegation (the government delegation). By mid-2000, women were in most of the dozen or so delegations in Arusha, a clear improvement over the past. At the time of my investigation, initiatives that had been undertaken regarding middle level dialogue had had an average one and a half years of implementation.

Significantly, CAP has served as a forum for a critical examination of the conflict in Burundi. The importance of such a forum is that historically, none had existed. The fact that there has never been a serious forum for the discussion of politics in Burundi speaks to perhaps the most crucial issue in Burundi; that is, the lack of an open dialogue about the causes and consequences of the conflict actually becomes a convenient way for both sides to avoid facing the reality of conflict itself. CAP has organized public forums in Bujumbura, the capital, with some of the forums being carried on radio and television. But it must be admitted that the meetings have not been frequent and have been affected to some extent by the uncertainties of the Arusha process.

Impacts of Intervention

The principal findings of the impact of middle level dialogue in Burundi are that they have an appreciable influence in bringing individuals and groups of people together to address critical questions regarding political development in Burundi. The fact that "middle class" Barundi from the two principal ethnic groups can actually sit at a table and talk about the need to resolve the decades-long political crisis; or to simply have a meal together is in itself remarkable. As Patrick Merienne of Alert stated to me, any intervention in Burundi is helpful because it creates alternatives to conflict. This was also the view of Aqnes Niyonizigiye of CAFOB. Similar to CAP's activities but with a focus on women, CAFOB organizes seminars both in Bujumbura and a few select sites outside of the capital city. Sites outside of Bujumbura create a logistical nightmare because of general insecurity in the countryside, but CAFOB is determined to bring its message to women in Burundi. All CAFOB seminars have one overriding message: the search for peace.

For CAFOB, the search for peace in Burundi must include at its core, the condition of women. Women have borne a great deal of the burden in the Burundi conflict because not only do they have to deal with historical gender inequities, but have suffered even more because a large number of men have either been killed or exiled thus forcing women to assume multiple roles in society under very trying circumstances. Further, CAFOB's message to women in general is that women must not allow themselves to be manipulated by the political elite. Women should strive for economic independence as this would give them more options in life; and they would not continue to be held hostage by government initiatives which are always politically driven as opposed to addressing the real problems of women.

In visits to all organizations listed in the annex, the message was the same: dialogue is good because it has brought together people who previously did not talk to each other. The lack of dialogue—and hence the non/misunderstanding of "the other" gave ample opportunity for political elite manipulation. The evidence of the impact is primarily that there are these identifiable groups whose express purpose is to have public discussions about the future of Burundi; and within the same context, the expression of disappointment that as a group, the "middle" has allowed itself to be manipulated by the political elite. In the case of Burundi the fact that there is even a dialogue is an indication of progress. As Patrick Merienne of Alert put it in reference to CAP: "they have talked; within the context of Burundi, this is extremely important."[3] As further evidence of positive impact, CAP members have served as important role models for others in the country. They have jointly appeared on national television and radio; and they have led public for to influence public opinion that "the other camp are not monsters."

Patrick Merienne's views were echoed by other informants: Deo Ntibayindusha, coordinator of activities at the Martin Luther King International Centre (a Peace NGO); Jean-Marie Rugira, member of parliament and deputy president of LIPABU-Burundi

Patriotic League, another peace forum; and CAFOB, the Women's Collective. Much more importantly however, is the shift in perceptions about the outcome of the broader conflict. Virtually all informants were at pains to insist that no one side will emerge as an outright winner in the current conflict. Thus, is a dire need to continue the dialogue of national reconciliation. This dialogue must be parallel to the large political dialogue of which the official Arusha talks were the pinnacle of the process. There was also and indication of the need to continue with dialogue whether the Arusha talks succeeded or failed. In other words, these middle-level groups want to move beyond their historical status of "victims" to a new status where the political elite takes note of their presence.

Having noted the positive impacts that the dialogue has brought in terms of a genesis for inter-ethnic elite contact, it is also important to recognize the limits of this approach in the context of Burundi. The political reality in Burundi is that the state is highly authoritarian, and considerably ethnically exclusivist. And within the context of Bujumbura, the number of people who have to date been part of the dialogue seem to be members of a self-select group whose congruence of views on politics in Burundi makes the dialogues an easy thing to undertake. It is essentially "preaching to the choir." Further, even through the dialogue idea seems to resonate widely in the various NGOs around Bujumbura, the number of people involved in this process is quite limited. Informants indicated that for CAP itself, there were no more than fifty identifiable individuals who have actively participated in a serious dialogue about Burundi's political past, and what needs to be done to create conditions for sustainable peace in the country for the future.

The limited number of participants in the dialogue speaks to one of the major shortcomings of this process. The other serious problem seems to be the difficulties that CAP members within Burundi have had in convincing Barundi elites outside the country that this is a worthwhile endeavor. In a lengthy interview with Dennis Nshimirana, President of CAP and also Minister of Rural Development in Burundi (and an ethnic Hutu), one of the objectives of CAP has been to bring the message of dialogue to Barundi elite exiled in neighboring African countries and in Europe. Specifically, Mr. Nshimirana said that Hutu elites specifically saw the dialogue as a ploy by the Burundi regime to show the world that the regime was willing to allow an inter-ethnic dialogue to take place, and therefore that the regime was "democratizing." In essence however, argued the exiles, the power structure in Burundi remained firmly in the hands of the Tutsi elite, and that Hutus such as Mr. Nshimirana had become agents of an oppressive regime.

As a result of the suspicions of the exiled elite, CAPs meetings in Dar es Salaam and Germany for example, where a significant number of Hutu elites live were not very successful. The meeting in Germany in 1999 for example, was a complete disaster when opposition to the presence of CAP members elicited a near riot at the meeting place. The impression that one gets from the reluctance of those in exile to accept CAP as a genuine forum for dialogue is that those in exile argue that if the regime in Burundi genuinely saw that CAP was serious about breaking up age old advantages of the current power structure in Burundi, the government would immediately quash the effort.

The fact that CAP was still operating in Burundi then implies that it is more image than substance. Talking to Mr. Nshimirana, one gets the sense that he himself realized the uphill battle that CAP has to fight to get rid of the image that the organization is actually toothless at best, and an agent of the regime at worst.

Fundamentally, the conclusion that emerges out to an analysis of an organization such as CAP is that intervention such as the one under review here would have limited impact in a political environment such as the one found in Burundi. The limits of this strategy are actually predicated on the limits imposed by history, and the political system itself. The biggest challenge in this context is to actually identify existing elite (a tall order in Burundi); once the elites have been identified, to have them participate in such dialogues. Nshimirana and other respondents constantly mentioned that over time, the biggest political problem in Burundi was that Hutu and Tutsi elite never talked to each other, and that these two segments of the elite proceeded to mobilize the population on ethnic grounds. Peasants in Burundi, so goes the argument, always lived together in communities without major problems. Peasants usually took action vis-à-vis with the other ethnic group only after they had been mobilized by the elite. Whether one accepts this argument or not, the fact that it is an argument articulated by the elite themselves is itself significant and deserves attention.

Ultimately, an assessment as whether the intervention has an impact really has to be analyzed in the context of the overall political situation in Burundi. Here the context of the negotiations to bring about political transition in Burundi has to be the overarching issue. The question has to be for example, whether CAP dialogues had an effect on negotiations in Arusha. The answer to this important question is that we do not know. But if political tensions persist in Burundi, even after the Arusha process, even though some members of CAP were delegates in Arusha, then the answer is that the middle-level dialogues under discussion here have had less impact. This assessment Is primarily dictated by two factors: first, the fact that any answer will be speculative and not based on concrete evidence; and two, the limited duration in terms of the time period the dialogue process has been underway.

Thus we have two interpretations of the impact here. For those involved in the dialogue within Burundi, the general assessment is that the dialogue is enabling the elite to begin shepherding the process of peace, playing the role of traditional civil society. On the other hand, an independent observer must come away with the sense that the jury is still out regarding this process.

The Contextual and Situational Conditions

The immediate context that informs this case is the fact that political conflict within Burundi has been a persistent feature of the political system since the country gained independence. The conflict has primarily been fueled by the struggle for power and the need to create conditions for democratic governance. Since independence, the conflict has degenerated into Tutsi versus Hutu, with the former slinging to power at all costs because of the population distribution that heavily favors the Hutu. Tutsi fear has been that any genuine democratic election would inevitably degenerate into an ethnic census, and Tutsi would always suffer at the hands of the Hutu majority. This has justified Tutsi domination of the State, and has resulted in the creation of a highly authoritarian system. Prior to 1994, the Tutsi looked at Rwanda as an example of what would happen to them if the Hutu's controlled governments. In post 1994, Tutsi control of the state in Rwanda, and the general political instability in the region provides the context in which the political crisis in Burundi has to be understood.

The larger context of the conflict in Burundi is the general crisis in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa. As John Prendergast and David Smock succinctly put it recently:

It is widely understood that the continuing conflicts in the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi are linked inextricably through cross-border insurgencies, cross-border ethnic linkages, and cross-border economic ties. The legacy of genocide—both the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which nearly a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed and the smaller, no less significant, 1972 genocide of Hutus in Burundi—and major communal massacres, such as the 1993 massacres of Tutsi in Burundi; hangs heavily over the Great Lakes region (1999:2).

Thus one of the critical issues in reconciliation in Burundi is the resolution of the larger problem that now centers on the fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in which not only forces of Rwanda and Burundi have been dispatched, but also involves the armies of Uganda, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, and the Sudan. Since 1994, Burundi has come into sharper international focus and the world community has sought to prevent another Rwanda like genocide. The most notable efforts have been through the United Nations, where the UN Secretary General has had his special representation in Bujumbura since the mid-1990s. Other international players include the Organization of African Unity (OAU)—although its role has been limited primarily by lack of resources; the United States through the President's special envoy to the Great Lakes region; and the European Union. At the heart of all these international efforts is the negotiation process in Arusha, Tanzania where a peace accord was signed in late August 2000. More than a dozen political groups—including the government of Pierre Buyoya—signed the Arusha accord although some important groups including the main Hutu rebel force had strong misgivings about the Accord, and initially refused to sign it. The principal issue of contention is power-sharing and the integration of the Tutsi

dominated army with Hutu rebels. The observation by Prendergast and Smock made a full year before Arusha still remained the key question for the success of negotiations:

Military reform is a prerequisite for peace and probably the most contentions issue between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi. Effective reform will require opening up recruitment, integrating some of the rebel forces, demobilizing, and setting in motion a process leading to more equal representation between Hutu and Tutsi in the military (1999:16).

While these were issues that occupied a great deal of time in Arusha, and there seemed to have been an agreement accepted by a good number of delegations in Arusha, the post-Arusha political situation sees to be uncertain to determine whether the agreement will be implemented.

Conclusions

Assessing a political process, which has been underway for three years or less, is predictably, a hazardous enterprise. However, in contexts where bloody conflicts abounded before and now there seems to be less of it, something obviously must have happened to allow for such a break in the conflict to occur. In the case of Burundi, the promotion of dialogue among elite groups and individuals has been somewhat successful, particularly if we consider the overall context of the political situation in the country. To some extent, a culture of dialogue is beginning to emerge within the non-governmental world in Bujumbura, the capital. Claims of a similar culture emerging beyond Bujumbura could not be verified by the limited nature of this study. For security reasons, I could not venture beyond Bujumbura, but statements by organizations such as CAFOB and LIPABU indicated that their membership was trying to replicate in the countryside, what they were doing in Bujumbura. Furthermore, CAP was not only having some impact in Bujumbura with its weekly meetings and appearances on television and radio, but with the Burundi diaspora in the region (Tanzania and Kenya); and in Europe where most of the educated Hutu live.

The primary reason for the relative success of this initiative is that although it is financed by outside sources, the process is run by Barundi themselves. The issue of ownership of the process is extremely important, especially under conditions of historical suspicion and manipulation, which the population at large has endured over a period of forty years. The overwhelming majority of my informants indicated how useful the dialogue had been to the peace process. Some of my informants, such as Minister Denis Mshimirirana, were themselves part of delegations to Arusha and they noted how useful the dialogue inside Burundi had been in their work at Arusha. They saw Arusha as a logical extension of the internal dialogue.

Having noted the positive elements of the dialogue, it must be recognized that the process itself has its shortcomings and it is conducted among a self-select group of individuals. The principal shortcoming is that the dialogue is still an elite driven and dominated process. All my informants had decent jobs in Bujumbura and were invariably graduates of the National University in Bujumbura, or had been trained abroad. This fact can be explained by the historical reality of politics in Burundi but the dangers inherent in purely elite dialogue must be recognized early. If the biggest complaint about political development in Burundi has been elite manipulation, then the non-political elite at the center of middle-level dialogue must ensure that their effort trickles to the general population. This would give the dialogue process more legitimacy and relevance.

Recommendations

USAID should continue in its efforts to support middle level dialogue in Burundi. One of the biggest political problems in Burundi has been the lack of the crucial middle level where public sentiments could be filtered. It is crucial however, that this support be channeled through organizations that command legitimacy in the country. There are several NGOs operating in Burundi, (including Alert and Search for Common Ground), which have a reasonable understanding of the complexities of politics in Burundi. These NGOs should serve as the sounding board for any USAID effort.

USAID must avoid getting caught up in a perception of playing favorites with any group. This would undermine the efforts of dialogue and neutrality that are so important in maintaining organizational credibility. This is not to suggest however, that any serious violation of human rights and other similar transgressions should elicit a neutral response. The idea here is that once you are rightly or wrongly identified with a particular group in the complex situation of Burundi, it is difficult to disentangle yourself.

There has to be an insistence by USAID that support is for the peace-effort and not waging an ideological war, and that peace dialogue is a prerequisite for economic development.

There has to be patience on the part of those who evaluate "progress." In Burundi, where "mythmaking" and "demonization" of the "other" side has been going on for so long, success must be judged on an incremental basis, not the big bang. The fact that there is dialogue is itself success. Perhaps this is where the question of "lessons learned" need to be addressed. It is quite clear that the biggest lesson learned in Burundi is that the commitment to peacemaking has to be long-term. The process of dialogue will have to be understood as a very long proposition. There are bound to be setbacks, which mean that small steps are in themselves victories where none exist. In the larger context of the region, there are also lessons that may be applicable to the Democratic Republic of Cong, if and when serous efforts at peacemaking get underway.

Notes

1. For security reasons, my visit was confined to Bujumbura, the capital. The country had a general curfew between midnight and dawn. However, because of uncertainty and increased tension between the Burundi government and rebels, the American embassy advised its American citizens to be indoors by 10:00pm.

2. The rough English translation of Compagnie des Apotres de la Paix is "Apostles for Peace."

3. Interview notes, July 19, 2000.

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Building Peace in Rwanda and Burundi" United States Institute of Peace Special Report, September 15.

Persons Interviewed

1. Deo Ntibayindusha, Martin Luther King International Centre, Coordinator of the Centre's Activities
2. Guy-Emmanuel Ntambutso, Interpreter
3. Denis Nshimirana, Minister of Rural Development and President of CAP; Also a delegate to Arusha
4. Jean-Marie Rugira, Member of Parliament, Deputy President of LIPABU (Burundi Patriotic League)
5. Aques Niyonizigiye, Coordinator of Programs, the Association of Women's Organizations (CAFOB)
6. Rev. Juvenal Ntakarashira Peace and Reconciliation Desk, National Council of Churches of Burundi (NCCB)
7. Patrick Merienne, Alert International Representative, Bujumbura
8. Cassien Ndikwayo, Health Projects Manager, African Revival Ministries
9. The Rt. Rev. John Wesley Nduwayo, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Burundi; Gitega Diocese, and President of the National Council of Churches of Burundi (NCCB).
10. Louis R. Putzel, Search of Common Ground, Burundi

Burundi: Chronology of Events

- 7th-10th centuries Bantu Hutu occupy present area of Rwanda/Burundi
- 15th-16th centuries Tutsi arrive in the region from the area of Ethiopia; subsequent creations of a semi-feudal socio-economic system with Tutsi predominating
- 1885 Germany formally colonizes Rwanda/Burundi; retain most of indigenous political organization
- 1916 Belgian troops occupy Burundi in World War I
- 1923 The League of Nations awards Belgium a mandate of Rwanda/Burundi; Belgians retain most indigenous institutions; Theoretically Tutsi continue to predominate but a "middle class" (ganwa) composed primarily of Tutsi with some Hutu, perform most of the administration
- 1946 Rwanda/Burundi become a United Nations Trust Territory
- 1961 September 18, elections for the National Assembly held. UPRONA headed by prince Louis Rwegasore, eldest son of the King win a sweeping victory
- 1961 October 13 Prince Rwegasore is assassinated before taking office as Premier
- 1962 June 27, the General Assembly passes a resolution calling for the establishment of two independent nations Rwanda and Burundi.
- 1962 July 1, Burundi becomes independent. Two parties are prominent: the National Progress and Unity Party (UPRONA) and the People's Party (PP). Conflict within UPRONA between Hutu and Tutsi wings lead to Hutu wing joining PP in the national Assembly
- 1965 January Hutu Prime Minister Ngendadnwe is assassinated; tension builds
- 1965 September Mwambutsa VI is succeeded by his son King Ntare V
- 1966 November 29, King Ntare is deposed by Lt. Colonel Micombero. Burundi is declared a Republic
- 1969 alleged Hutu coup attempt is unsuccessful; leading to another Hutu purge
- 1972 April, another coup attempt; civil war follows with mass murder on both sides but majority killed are Hutu; educated Hutu are systematically massacred; virtually all Hutu elements eliminated from the armed forces.
- 1976 November 1, President Micombero is overthrown in bloodless coup; succeeded by Lt. Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza
- 1987 President Bagaza is overthrown by Major Buyoya
- 1988 August, There is renewed violence. The army randomly kills as many as 20,000 Hutus
- 1991 Discussions leading to "Charter of National Unity" opening the door for constitutional reform and the reemergence of competitive party politics. The army is not pleased as FRODEBU a predominantly (but not exclusively) Hutu party emerges as the leading party
- 1993 June Elections result in a FRODEBU win. New government formed under President Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu who in turn appoints a Tutsi Prime Minister in spirit of "reconciliation."
- 1993 October 21 President Ndadaye is overthrown and killed in a military coup. He is succeeded by Cyprien Ntaryamira

- 1994 April 6 President Ntaryamira is killed along with President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda in a mysterious plane crash in Kigali, Rwanda—unleashing the Rwanda genocide.
- 1994-1996 The reemergence of army authoritarian rule; and the return of Major Buyoya (August 1996) and continued violence in the countryside. Thousands of Hutu civilians are killed. Regional Embargo against Burundi, leading to economic difficulties.
- 2000 August 29 the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement among Burundi's many factional groups. Some of the most powerful factions hold out, making the success of the Agreement uncertain.